97-84098-4

Quackenbos, Mary Grace

A question for the House of governors

New York

[1909?]

97-84098-4

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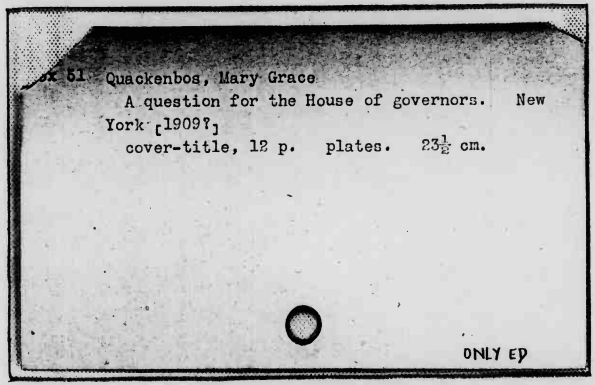

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 11:1 IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 5-23-97 INITIALS: PB

TRACKING # : 21163

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A Question
for the
House of Governors

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MARY GRACE QUACKENBOS
THE PEOPLES LAW FIRM
132 NASSAU STREET, NEW YORK CITY

A Question for the House of Governors.

Two problems of immediate importance to the National Government and to every State and Territory fall logically for solution within the jurisdiction of the House of Governors. They are the immigrant and tuberculosis problems, and are so closely related that the solution of the one means the ultimate eradication of the other.

The appalling number of deaths from tuberculosis is directly traceable to the enormous herdings of population. This is strikingly indicated in the report of the New York Committee on Tuberculosis.

> "The tuberculosis situation in New York is critical. The great danger to the community is from the uninstructed careless consumptive in his tenement home."

There are in New York City today—

44,000 known consumptives.
28,000 uncared for now.
24,000 new cases each year.
20,000 have died from consumption in two years.

Immigration, adding continually to the congestion, has reached abnormal proportions, and it is now a matter of vital and urgent necessity to reduce this congestion and divert from tenements to rural districts the inpouring throngs.

Last year 256,425 admitted aliens gave their destination as New York;[1] of these 112,816 were either farmers, farm laborers, or had no occupation, and could therefore have been utilized in agricultural work. Yet they remained in cities while

[1]This was 32% of the entire number admitted; over 64% went to five Northern States, leaving but 36% to scatter themselves over all the remaining portions of our vast country.

millions of acres of farm lands throughout the country lie uncultivated and abandoned.

Distribution is the efficient remedy for both the tuberculosis and immigrant evils. This was recognized by Congress when on February 20, 1907, it established a national bureau—the Division of Information. The Act reads:

> "It shall be the duty of said division to promote a beneficial distribution of aliens admitted into the United States among the several States and Territories desiring immigration."

The most efficient distributing plan is manifestly one in which the idea of co-operation between the United States Government and the States is emphasized by permitting representatives of the States to have a voice in the enterprise; and still further emphasized as to co-operation between the States and the immigrant masses, by permitting representatives of the latter, also, to have a voice in the enterprise.

The Industrial and Agricultural Boards of the various States seeking to attract settlers and workers to develop their resources, are meeting with hindrances which may be summarized as follows:

1. It is difficult to induce aliens to move from cities where they are held by the natural attraction between countrymen.

2. Aliens lack confidence in strangers who urge them to go to a strange place under conditions vouched for by no one whom they know.

3. Aliens lack the means to pay for transportation.

4. There are no large central bureaus where workers may be collected in sufficient numbers to permit intelligent discrimination and selection for the respective classes of work.

To overcome these difficulties a plan is here submitted which is believed to be workable and feasible, and the law above quoted may stand, without amendment, as its basis.

I. MOVING ALIENS TO PREVENT OVERCROWDING IN CITIES.

There are Tenement-House Laws in most of our States especially designed to guard against overcrowding. The New York State Law reads:

> "No room in any tenement house shall be so overcrowded that there shall be afforded less than 400 cubic feet of air to each adult, and 200 cubic feet of air to each child under twelve years of age."

Enforcement of such a law is more urgent than is new legislation. In this manner there will be made available for distribution many of the multitude now living in the 102,000 tenements of New York City. In any event, and what is of equal importance, it will prevent arriving masses from settling in already overfilled sections,[2] thus safeguarding them from disease and increasing the number of distributed workers. When groups of newcomers settle in distant States their countrymen will be gradually drawn away from the tenements.

A strengthening of the present laws and their stricter enforcement might well be considered in recognition of their immediate relation to tuberculosis; appropriations for State Health Inspectors would ultimately be cheaper than the expense of meliorating the evils which their vigilance would prevent.

[2]The Committee on Congestion of Population reports "New York City has the greatest congestion in the civilized world." Dr. Stella, Official Delegate of the Italian Government to the Tuberculosis Congress at Washington, says: "While 9/10 of Italians who emigrate to the United States come from rural districts of Italy, 77% crowd in cities."

II. REASSURING ALIENS.

Aliens should be helped to find work for which they are fitted,[1] and should be protected from fraud. While our Federal laws are excellent for keeping undesirables out of the country there is a noticeable lack of Government protection for aliens admitted. They are suspicious, confused, unfamiliar with the new conditions, and unwilling to trust strangers who urge them to unknown and distant places. Thus they remain segregated and grouped in cities, a prey to padrones, pseudo-bankers, swindling labor agents and "white slave dealers." They cannot easily distinguish between these frauds and the honest inducements offered by State industrial representatives.

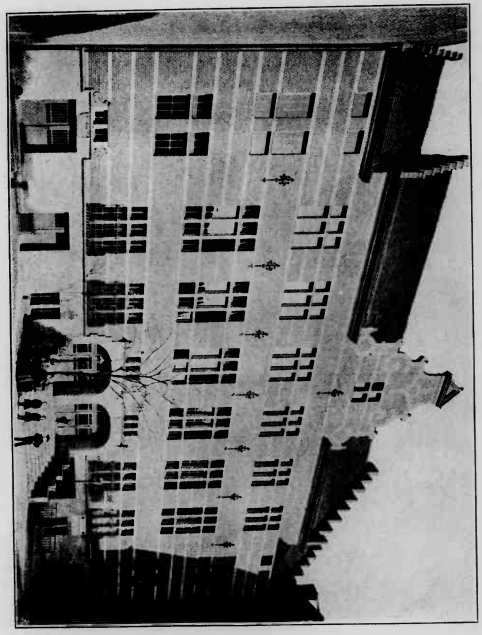
We have no central well-equipped labor exchange in the United States under recognized Government auspices—such as one sees in Germany—devoted exclusively to the dependent classes, where illiterate foreigners can find employment and have a voice in choosing their work, aided by representatives of their own government. In such they place great confidence.

Foreign government representatives are best able to distribute the alien masses here, whose characteristics they understand. Knowing the conditions from which they come these representatives can judge of those to which they should be sent, and in this manner entire families can be induced to settle in places where they are most needed.

International Co-operation.

The Division of Information should procure the co-operation of foreign associates, whose aid is obviously so essential. It is believed this could be obtained without new legisla-

[1]Labor agents, working for their commissions and not for the welfare of immigrants, have frequently sent tailors to a mine, masons to a cotton plantation, etc., while the natural farmers work in sweat shops and live in New York tenements.



THE CENTRAL LABOR EXCHANGE AT BERLIN, GORMANNSTRASSE

tion. The Act of February 20, 1907, authorizes the President, with the advice of the Senate, to enter into international agreements with foreign governments to regulate immigration matters. If practicable, the President might extend an invitation to each foreign nation to send a number of workers —not more than two or three—to act as associates with the Manager of the Division.

When an order for Italian workmen comes to our American Manager, he could request the Italian Associate to move as speedily as possible the particular number of Italians required; Greeks could be moved by a Greek, Hungarians by a Hungarian, etc. The salaries of the foreign associates, paid by the respective governments, would be insignificant as compared with the expense these governments are now under in maintaining and returning those who become helpless from tuberculosis and other causes.[4]

[4]Foreign consuls return to Europe many persons suffering and dying with tuberculosis. Dr. Stella says: "To prove that tuberculosis instead of being imported is contracted by immigrants in this country, among 309,503 Italian immigrants who left Italy for the United States in two years there were but 2 cases of tuberculosis (due to the strict vigilance of the United States Government). Among those homeward bound during the same two years, there were 457 in the ships' hospitals with tuberculosis, besides 17 who died at sea."

Return passages were supplied by the Italian Benevolent Institute of New York, in five years, to 973 emigrants; about 1/3 of these were men afflicted with tuberculosis.

From August 1 to September 17, 1909, 59 Italians, suffering with tuberculosis, were returned to Naples from the United States. The situation is similar with respect to other countries in Europe.

III. ASSISTED TRANSPORTATION.

Another serious difficulty in distribution can be lightened if the States will provide the means for transporting aliens who settle within their borders. A man must go to work the day after he arrives; he cannot afford to spend his $25 in railroad fare, so he remains in the city tenement indefinitely. When work is scarce he may become a public charge, or worse.[5] If there is opportunity for him in the West or South and he lacks traveling expenses there should be some fund available from which he could borrow a sufficient amount at a moderate rate of interest; or a co-operative system might be patterned after one in operation between the Government of New South Wales, the transportation companies, and Great Britain.

Assisted Passages in New South Wales.

Persons living in England's tenements are helped to emigrate to New South Wales by means of "assisted passages" which are purchased by the New South Wales Government from the Steamship Companies at reduced rates and given gratis to thousands of applicants who otherwise would be unable to leave the cities. The Central Office at London is in charge of a General Agent who receives all applications for labor, and obtains through the Labor Agent of New South Wales information concerning conditions, wages, etc., there. At Sidney incoming workers are met by the State Labor Agent and sent forward to their proper destinations. Those entering agricultural pursuits are granted liberal concessions.

New South Wales has recognized the economic value of the system and is contributing £25,000 for "assisted passages." According to a recent report emigration has now resolved itself into the number of berths available on each outgoing steamer, there being about three would-be emigrants to each berth.

[5]During the year 1907-8 there were 49,454 aliens detained in charitable reformatory and penal institutions of the North Atlantic and North Central States, while only 3,487 were thus detained in the South Atlantic and South Central States, and 7,051 in the Western States.

Over one-third of last year's applicants were "nominated passengers," that is to say, they were nominated by friends previously assisted who had found work advantageous in New South Wales.

New South Wales System Applied in the United States.

A similar co-operative plan can be adopted here. The legislatures of each State and Territory could appropriate a special fund to be used when necessary for assisted transportation of admitted aliens. A State Labor Agent could be appointed in each State and Territory to study and make record of industrial and agricultural conditions there. These State Agents could meet and select an Agent-General to represent the States collectively in the Division of Information at New York, and to whom requests for labor could be forwarded. Data concerning working opportunities could be gathered by him from the Labor Agents of the respective States, and filed in the Division with the General Manager. Assisted passages could be procured through this Agent-General. Should assisted transportation be regarded as a loan, the amount advanced could be collected in instalments from the alien's wages and returned to the State, either by the State Labor Agent or Consular Agent residing in the locality.

This plan merely emphasizes the idea of co-operation and adds but one new element. The Division of Information now exists under the Act above quoted, the various States have their Agricultural and Industrial Boards and their election of a representative is a simple matter. Little argument is needed to establish that the economic value of bringing workers within a State will far outweigh the cost of assisted passages. The new and essential element is that of foreign co-operation and favorable assurances in this regard have already been obtained from high officials abroad. It is believed that little difficulty may be expected in this regard since other countries have already developed similar systems and appreciate their value.

In this connection it is interesting to study Germany's efficient system of bringing together the unemployed and working opportunities.

IV. THE CENTRAL LABOR EXCHANGE AT BERLIN.

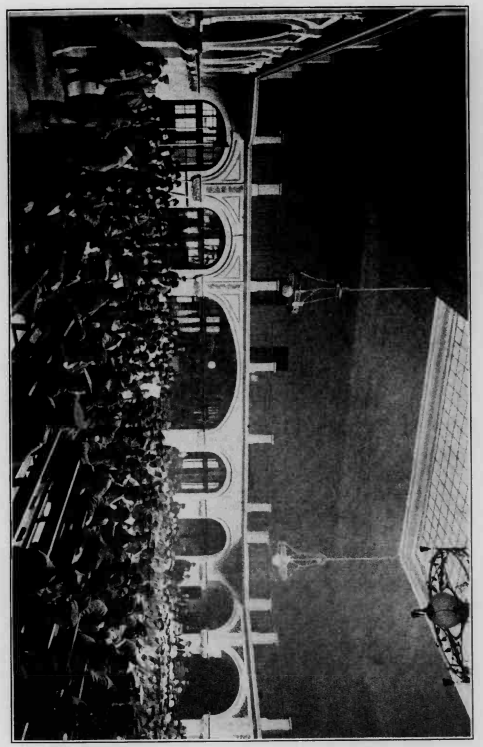
In Berlin two substantial five-storied brick and stone buildings—large enough to accommodate 4,000 persons at one time—are devoted entirely to the unemployed. These are open in spring, summer and autumn from 7 A. M. to 6 P. M., and in winter from 8 A. M. to 6 P. M. Men and women while waiting for work are comfortably housed in large, well-lit, attractive assembly halls.

The Exchange puts to work from 250 to 400 persons daily. In one year, alone, employment was found for 95,678 men and women, while providing shelter for 158,098.* All this is carried on at a cost of £5,000 a year, £3,000 of which is Government subsidy and £2,000 the contribution of applicants and trade unions. The machinery is simple and there are but twenty-seven workers on the staff. The work is divided into three departments—for unskilled working men and boys, for women and girls, and for skilled labor. Any person needing employment may apply to the Exchange and pay a small fee of 2½d. entitling him to a membership card for a period of three months.

Department for Unskilled Labor.

The spacious assembly hall devoted to unskilled labor resembles the trading floor of a stock exchange. There daily from 1,200 to 1,500 men, awaiting work, sit smoking, chatting, or reading newspapers, grouped near various sign-posts labelled "teamsters," "common-laborers," "farmers," "masons," etc., describing the kind of work for which they are adapted. These groups are subdivided by signs reading "January, February, March," indicating the date at which the various workers filed applications. The Manager, in his office at one side

*These figures are about the size of our tuberculosis statistics of deaths and sufferers in New York City alone. The total reckoning in all overcrowded cities of the United States would far outweigh the numbers sheltered and put to work in Germany.



ASSEMBLY HALL FOR UNSKILLED LABORERS, BERLIN EXCHANGE

of the hall, receives orders for laborers by messenger, letter, and telephone. At intervals throughout the day he enters the hall, raps for silence, and reads aloud these orders; the waiting workers eagerly hand up their membership cards; the Manager carefully selects those most competent, giving preference to the ones who have waited longest and who have families dependent upon them. In separate rooms the workers can meet prospective employers. No pressure is exercised, but the terms of employment are fully explained. One who is not engaged, or who refuses the job, may recover his membership card and resume his place upon the waiting list.

Many laborers are sent to farms throughout the country, and proprietors of large industries who employ many workmen have filed their exclusive orders with this exchange. They recognize the advantage in having a central official bureau at which their requests are promptly filled. Rarely is the right man sent to the wrong place, for workers are collected in sufficient numbers to permit of intelligent discrimination and selection for the various classes of work. Those who seek to take advantage of the Exchange are quickly detected and refused privileges of membership.

Department for Skilled Labor.

Labor unions heartily contribute to the maintenance of the Exchange; therefore, union members are not required to pay an initiation fee. This department is subdivided into various trades with separate rooms for each, where an immense amount of information concerning labor conditions, wages, strikes, etc., is centralized. The managers of the branches are selected by the various unions.

Department for Women and Girls.

This department is managed by an experienced woman who understands the needs of individual workers. Applicants are arranged in specialized groups, similar to those in

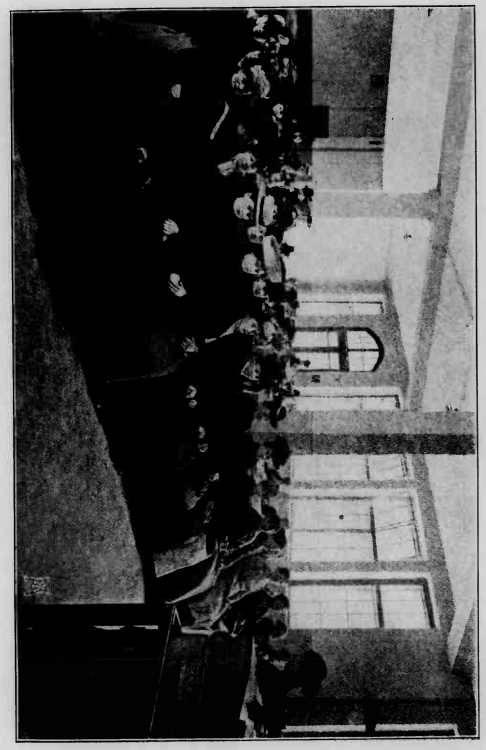
the Department for Unskilled Labor, and the Manager's desk is in the same room. All sorts of female help is fitted into proper spheres, and careful attention is given to placing unmarried women and girls in good homes as domestics. Proper boarding houses are suggested to those out of work, and in special cases the Exchange shelters a few. Business and good fellowship are combined in this branch and practical advice is given and appreciated.

The need of a similar branch for women and girls in our Division of Information at New York is shown in the recent report of the Congressional Commission on Immigration as to the harboring of women in the United States for immoral purposes.

The Berlin Exchange can co-operate with every city and town in Germany, but similar bureaus in Munich and elsewhere have developed from it.[7]

Here is a complete, simple, and work-finding institution which has proved the feasibility of co-operation. It is in sharp contrast with the New York branch of our National Distribution Bureau, located in three small dismal rooms in the basement of the Maritime Building. The expense for maintenance of this branch of the Division of Information is about $30 a day, and in 15 months it distributed 2,099 workers, while the Berlin Exchange at an expense of but $68 a day distributed in 12 months 95,678 men and women workers. What is the cause of this difference? Undoubtedly the serious defect in the mode of distribution, heretofore, has been the failure to work upon the problem on the basis of co-operation of all the interests involved.

[7]The Exchange has a lunch room where coffee with milk and sugar can be bought for ½d., a sandwich or slice of sausage for 1½d., etc., cigars 3 for a penny, and cigarettes 5 a half-penny. Boots can be repaired and clothes mended and cleaned for a half-penny each. There is a medical and hospital room, with first-aid equipment, a free legal bureau, and in the basement a white tiled bath room, where hot and cold shower baths, in separate booths, including soap and clean towels, can be had for ½d. Newspapers and magazines are furnished free by the Exchange librarian.



A ROOM IN THE WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT OF THE BERLIN EXCHANGE

We need no new legislation, and but little further expense is necessary, to make the Division of Information the greatest immigrant clearing house in the world. Its present managers, with the splendid foundation they have laid and their vast knowledge of industrial and agricultural conditions throughout the country, are well qualified to make it a success. They have been handicapped for lack of support.

How far may the National Government count upon the States and Territories to aid in this work, so that distribution may be impartially made on a basis fair to the alien and to his employer?

The enforcement by the States of the laws against overcrowding would at once lead to a distribution of the surplus population and of arriving aliens. These could be gathered together in large central bureaus in New York, Chicago, and other cities. Some public-spirited person, or group of persons, might donate suitable buildings in these immigrant centers, and lease the same to the Government at a nominal rent. (The two ample exchange buildings in Berlin were made possible by contribution.) Wise selection for various classes of employment in the States and Territories could be made by the Foreign Associates from the assembled workers, and foreign colonies could be promoted in rural districts. The further cooperation by the States in providing for assisted transportation, with the representation they would have in the Division, through their Agent-General, would obviate present difficulties in sending the workers on, and lessen the insecurity with respect to repayment of advanced transportation. When workers and settlers reach the States and Territories they could be met by State Agents, who could guide them to their proper destinations.

I believe that a co-operative work such as this would be conducive to the welfare of our country. Some of its results would be:

Immigrant masses could be reached to better advantage; therefore, their residence could be regulated.

Alien traffic could be turned away from cities to sparsely populated sections and the demand for labor could always be met.

The tuberculosis evil could be eradicated by cleaning out the densely populated cities of the North.

Healthy arriving peasants could be saved from tuberculosis and from other evils of tenements and sweat-shops.

Labor could be raised to a standard of respectability and the activities of unprincipled labor agents could be curtailed.

Women and girls could be safeguarded against viciousness and "white slave traders" could be driven out.

Criminal and illegal immigration could be detected.

Foreign colonies could be encouraged in rural districts.

Citizenship could be advanced by a readier assimilation with our native born.

MARY GRACE QUACKENBOS.

December 1909

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